

Book Review: The Notodontidae of South Africa

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Alexander Schintlmeister and Thomas J. Witt 2015: The Notodontidae of South Africa including Swaziland and Lesotho (Lepidoptera: Notodontidae). Proceedings of the Museum Witt, Volume 2, Munich and Vilnius. 104 distribution maps, 37 colour plates, 42 plates with genitalia figures, 288 pages. ISBN: 978-3-940732-19-4. Price €89 plus additional postage.¹

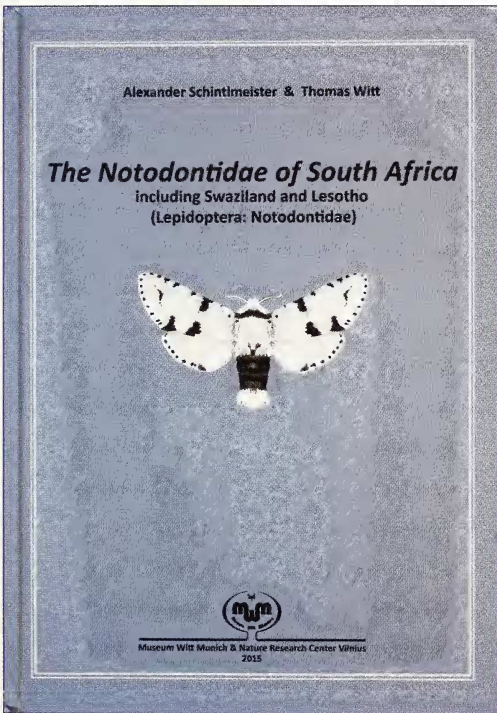


Figure 1. The cover of the book “The Notodontidae of South Africa including Swaziland and Lesotho (Lepidoptera: Notodontidae)”.

It came as something of a surprise to see this book. Well-illustrated taxonomic works on the Lepidoptera of sub-Saharan Africa are seldom seen. It is nicely bound in A4 format; often such publications are only available on the Internet, which has the advantage of availability at low cost, but a book still has much appeal if it can be afforded. More of a surprise, when reading the introduction, was that it appears to have been conceived only in 2013. A colossal amount of work must have been put in preparing text and photographs to a high standard.

The Introduction sets out clearly the way in which species are to be described, then follows an historical account of the study of these moths in South Africa with biographical details of the chief contributors. Much of the material described is in the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History (formerly the Transvaal Museum) in Pretoria.

A checklist of the 99 species treated follows with 44 names reduced to synonymy which is as important as the twelve new species and three genera which are described.

¹ The book can be ordered online from the Museum Witt Munich website (http://www.insecta-web.org/MWM/htmls/museum_proceedings_en.html).

The taxonomic part, including description or redescription of each species, fills the main part of the book. Each species has the original description cited and is then described under the headings: diagnosis, bionomics, and distribution. A dot distribution map is included in each case, which includes all the countries of Southern Africa north to the Zambezi River. In critical cases the descriptions are augmented with illustrations pointing out the differences between closely related species. For newly described species the label data of the type series is given in full. There follows a full list of references and a list of the taxonomic changes introduced.

The genitalia figures, occupying 81 pages, are photographs in monochrome, male and female of the same species alongside each other; in many cases the posterior segments of the male abdomen are also illustrated. The colour plates of adults show life size specimens on a uniform pale blue-grey background in most cases and are of high quality. For some species there are also photographs of blown larvae; the data relating to each specimen illustrated are cited in full.

Colour photographs of live specimens and of larvae of some species follow filling the next six plates, then there are photographs of many of the habitats referred to in the text, indicated also by adjoining maps.

This work has been well researched, the taxonomic treatment is thorough and well documented and sensible choices have been made about what information should be included.

For anyone working in Southern Africa this book will be a huge asset and it should also be of interest to those farther afield who are interested in this family. I commend it wholeheartedly.